

## Is India Doing America's Bidding Against China?

By [Andrew Korybko](#) and [Parth Satam](#)

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**Andrew Korybko** gave an interview to Indian journalist **Parth Satam** (June 2020) about India's relations with China, the US, and Russia, just days before Monday night's deadly clash between Indian and Chinese troops. Two excerpts were ultimately included in the article that Mr. Satam was writing about this topic. Given its importance in light of the latest clash, OneWorld is publishing the interview in its entirety with Mr. Satam's permission.

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**Parth Satam:** Can the present India-China border standoff be viewed as a larger part of the changing geopolitical scenario driven by the US pullout in Afghanistan, the abrogation of Article 370 (special status for Kashmir) by the Modi government, and the growing Indian proximity to the US where India is toeing the American line on Chinese issues (e.g. joining the anti-China chorus on the COVID pandemic)?

**Andrew Korybko:** Absolutely, that's the most accurate way to assess the current situation. The preexisting differences between China and India on a host of issues were exacerbated by India's abrogation of Article 370. Beijing condemned New Delhi for violating UNSC Resolutions on the disputed region, then some Indian officials reaffirmed their claims to Aksai Chin, which provoked a defensive reaction from China. This escalating issue was then exploited by the US, which has a shared interest with India in "containing" China, as they both perceive it. That's why American officials have started comparing the latest incident to the situation in the South China Sea in an attempt to draw a parallel of so-called "Chinese aggression" and therefore justify their ever-intensifying "[comprehensive global strategic partnership](#)" with India (per what they both agreed to call it during Trump's visit in February). It was therefore predictable that there would eventually be a flare-up since the situation is so tense, and India is being encouraged by the US to assert its claims. It naturally follows that India is also toeing the American line on other anti-Chinese issues as well, especially those related to the COVID-19 pandemic and "poaching" foreign companies from the People's Republic so as to re-engineer global supply chains in a way that supports the US' grand strategic goals.

**PS:** Strategists from both side of the political divide in India (albeit suspicious towards China) broadly agree that China does not intend to go to war with India despite its technological, military, and industrial superiority due to larger geopolitical priorities and is undertaking this current intrusion into Indian territories to signal to not threaten its interests in PoK and other anti-Chinese Indian moves (joining the QUAD, support to the Dalai Lama)

etc. What's your response to this assessment?

**AK:** I personally disagree with the characterization of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as "PoK", as well as describing the latest border incident as a Chinese "intrusion", but I do agree with the spirit of the view that China does not intend to go to war with India. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that India doesn't intend to go to war with China, even if only a brief border one similar in essence to what transpired between India and Pakistan in February 2019. Should that be the case, then I also predict that there would be a similar outcome, namely that India will not achieve its military objectives, though it might very well succeed with certain strategic ones.

For instance, India — whether rightly or wrongly, and irrespective of whether one supports its view or not — feels uncomfortable about China's de-facto leadership of both BRICS and the SCO. New Delhi's efforts to court Moscow as part of a grand "balancing" act have only been mildly successful but not enough to the point of making Russia as openly suspicious of China as India is. If there's a Chinese-Indian border war, however, then India would send several powerful signals to the whole world even if it militarily loses the likely brief conflict.

First, India would position itself as the country most directly "countering/containing" China, which would appeal to its new American ally and the latter's network of like-minded allies as well. Secondly, India would compel Russia to either choose a side (unlikely) or more vigorously "balance" between it and China. By default, any further tilt towards India along the lines of Russia's present trend (e.g. selling more advanced offensive weapons systems) would be interpreted very negatively by China, potentially weakening their strategic partnership to New Delhi and Washington's indirect advantage. And thirdly, BRICS and the SCO would never be the same again, which also serves American interests.

I don't endorse that scenario because I personally hope that it doesn't transpire, but I'd certainly understand what goals India is aiming for in the event that it happens. India also desperately needs another external enemy other than Pakistan to rally its domestic audience and distract them from the current economic difficulties and sharp partisan divides that have recently developed in the country. By presenting itself as the "American bulldog" against China, India hopes that it would receive preferential investment and other forms of support from the US and its allies, also enabling it to reach a more equitable trade deal with America later on.

**PS:** What is the Russian position on the Indian proximity to the US? Is the Russian Federation frustrated with India merely maintaining a transactional relationship in terms of weapons purchases or does it wish to take the partnership in newer dimensions (i.e. wanting it to be a part of the Eurasian Economic Union project)?

**AK:** I'm not an official representative of the Russian government so I can't speak about their formal position, but from what I've observed, they've expressed both sentiments in recent years. Lavrov [described](#) the so-called "Indo-Pacific" as "an artificially imposed concept" created by the US during a press conference in February 2019, and he [repeated](#) his skepticism about it during the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi back in January. At that second-mentioned time, however, he expressed hope that Russia's "Indian friends are smart enough to understand" that the US is simply trying to use this scheme to "contain" China.

Nevertheless, Russia has regularly reiterated its commitment to diversifying relations with India beyond their present mostly transactional nature largely dependent on military-

technical cooperation. This is evidenced by the joint statement that was released during Prime Minister Modi's attendance at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok as President Putin's guest of honor, where both leaders reaffirmed their strategic relations and promised to take them further than ever before. Two projects that are presently in the works are the Vladivostok-Chennai Maritime Corridor (VCMC) and selling BrahMos missiles to ASEAN states.

Russia's position on India's growing proximity to the US appears to be a mirror image of India's position towards Russia's growing proximity to China. Both Great Powers respect the other's sovereign right to reach whichever partnerships they'd like, though they'd prefer that neither of them occur at the other's expense (whether real, perceived, or speculatively latent). One solution for stabilizing their relations into the future would be to jointly lead a new Non-Alignment Movement (Neo-NAM), which I elaborated on in an article that I co-authored earlier this month for the official journal of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), which is run by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Titled "The Prospects of Russia and India Jointly Leading a New Non-Aligned Movement", it can be read in full for free [here](#). The proposal is already being actively discussed in one of Russia's top think tanks, the Valdai Club, and certainly deserves further study given the important "balancing" role that it can play in the future international system. In a gist, the idea calls for both of them to pool their collective resources (especially diplomatic and economic) towards creating a third pole of influence in the increasingly bipolar world led by the American and Chinese superpowers.

Not only could that help maintain trust between Russia and India, but it could also prevent one or the other from becoming their counterpart's "junior partner", something that they each fear for understandable reasons. That said, I've since expanded on my academic proposal to incorporate my prior work on the importance of Russian-Pakistani relations, which I explain at length in my analytical piece about how "[Improved Russian-Pakistani Relations Will Help Moscow Balance The New Bipolarity](#)". I assert that this could perfect Russia's "balancing" act by upholding its trust with China despite any progress that might be made on the Neo-NAM simultaneously with making India think twice about the consequences of more fully pivoting towards the US.

In sum, the solution to the dilemma posed by Russia's increasingly close relations with China as perceived by India and India's increasingly close relations with the US as perceived by Russia is for them both to come together to jointly lead a Neo-NAM, though Moscow's chances of successfully maintaining this complex "balancing" act between China and India would be greatly strengthened by the continued improvement of its relations with Pakistan for the aforementioned reasons. This scenario presents what I sincerely believe to be the best outcome for all five players — Russia, India, China, the US, and Pakistan — and would therefore greatly contribute to establishing a relative sense of order in today's extremely anarchic international arena.

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Mr. Satam's article that included the two earlier mentioned excerpts from this interview was published at the [Mission Victory India](#) autonomous defence think tank under the title "[What is China's Intent? The Answer is in the Regional Diplomatic Scenario & the New Cold War with the US](#)". Mr. Satam can be followed on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

**Andrew Korybko** is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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Andrew Korybko est le commentateur politique étasunien qui travaille actuellement pour l'agence Sputnik. Il est en troisième cycle de l'Université MGIMO et auteur de la monographie Guerres hybrides: l'approche adaptative indirecte pour un changement de régime(2015).

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